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14th Arm. Div.

Defense of Hatten

9-17 Jan. 1945

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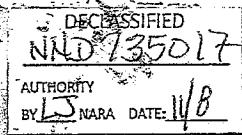
14TH ARMORED DIVISION
DEFENSE OF HATTEN
9 to 17 January 45

1. A highly detailed narrative by the historical officer on the eight day period of attack and subsequent defense of Hatten. Sources are official records and numerous interviews. Almost exclusively at company and platoon level, with many passages descriptive of small unit combat. 55 pages

2. Additional material: situation maps and one brief interview with CO, COOR, 14th Armd Division.

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ACTION AT HATTEN
9 to 17 January 1945

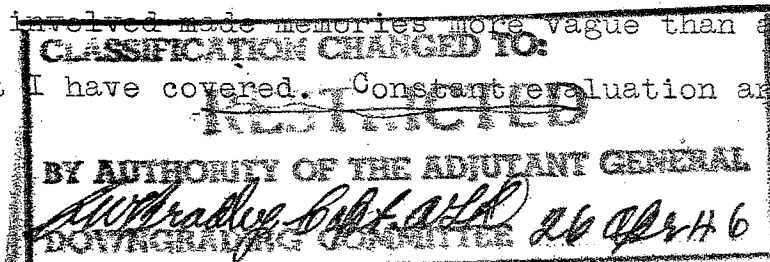


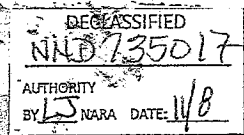
This study is an attempt to reconstruct the actions, thoughts and behavior of the participating soldiers in the Hatten battle as well as retaining the overall picture. The individual experiences related are synonymous with others encountered.

The usual procedure for obtaining the facts was followed. Division staff officers oriented the action. Their records kept the situation on an even keel. The staff officers designated the combat command which played the apparently significant part in the engagement. They also described the events leading up to, including, and following the encounter.

Next stop was the "significant" combat command. Here the commanding officer, staff officers and records were checked. The next journey was to battalion headquarters. At this point the battalion picture was gained by the same method, as well as other pertinent matters. Having a general idea of the scene, I then endeavored to find out HOW it was done. This was accomplished by going into the companies, platoons and squads actually engaged in the mission.

It was sometimes not possible to get the individuals together for a discussion or critique due to reorganization problems, "alerts" and other disturbing influences. Unfortunately many persons were not able to be contacted since they had been killed or evacuated as a result of the engagement. The nature of the operation involved made memories more vague than any other assignment I have covered. Constant evaluation and documentation





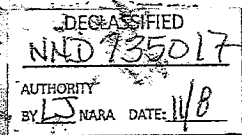
of statements with other persons was necessary when interrogating individuals to learn exactly what transpired. The "I. G." investigator, present in the area, did not help the situation at all.

After gathering the information from the smaller units it was found that certain gaps required filling in order to tell the picture. Further checking was necessary through subsequent channels to pick up anything that was missing. Naturally many interruptions occurred that were uncontrollable, but that was to be expected.

This small unit study is presented primarily to supplement the existing records, journals and histories where applicable. Dovetailed with these accounts, which can hardly show the details of an engagement, a clearer picture may be portrayed.

Pages #2 to #9 are a quick resumé of the situation as it appeared to the unit concerned before it was committed. The facts are not in complete narrative form and are not meant to be.

Edgar B. Mooney, Jr.
 EDGAR B. MOONEY, JR.
 1st Lt, Historical Sect.
 Seventh U. S. Army



In an effort to help restore the VI Corps' main line of resistance, the 14th Armored Division commanded by Brigadier General A. C. Smith made plans to seize Hatten and Rittershoffen.*

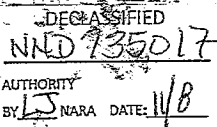
The quality of the German troops encountered in Hatten and Rittershoffen revealed that the enemy was throwing the best it had into these two villages in a determined effort to make its campaign a success.

The enemy had a great deal to gain if it could relieve American pressure from the Colmar Pocket and also join up with the bridgehead established across the Rhine River in the vicinity of Drusenheim. The apparent plan of the German High Command was to quickly join forces with the Drusenheim thrust before the Americans could regroup their forces. If rapidly fused, this joint force would be in a position to smash on through to Strasbourg. This accomplishment would have made good Heinrich Himmler's boast that German troops would be back in Strasbourg by 30 January 1945.** With the large Alsatian city in their hands, the enemy would be in a strategic position to add support to the Germans contained in the vicinity of Colmar by American and French forces.***

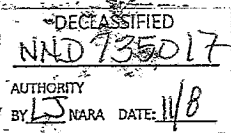
* - Operations Instructions #9, Hq. 14th Arm'd Div., 120030 Jan 1945.

** - G-2, 79th Infantry Division, Major Joseph W. Knott.

*** - Ibid.



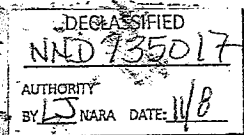
Enemy infantry type units identified in the battle of Hatten and Rittershoffen were (at Hatten) 1st Battalion, 35th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 1st Battalion, 119th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (later shifted to Rittershoffen) and the 2nd Battalion 119th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, all of the 26th Panzer Grenadier Division. These units participated in the first attack against Hatten on 9 January 1945. On 11 January the 220th Panzer Engineer Battalion of the 21st Panzer Division showed up. On 14 January the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 20th Parachute Regiment made their appearance and were followed the next day by the 2nd Battalion, 20th Parachute Regiment, all of the 7th parachute Division. January 16 saw the 104th Volks Grenadier Regiment of the 47th Volks Grenadier Division added to the force in Hatten. (At Rittershoffen) the 2nd Battalion, 125th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and the 1st Battalion 192nd Panzer Grenadier of the 21st Panzer Division engaged American forces on 10 January 1945. In the ensuing days the 1st Battalion, 119th Panzer Grenadier Regiment left Hatten to join the forces in Rittershoffen. On 13 January the 2nd Battalion, 192nd Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 21st Panzer Division appeared in Rittershoffen. Elements of the 104th Volks Grenadier Regiment arrived in Rittershoffen on 16 January. The following day the 103rd



Volks Grenadier Regiment were identified in Rittershoffen. These two latter regiments are of the 47th Volks Grenadier Division. These units were supported throughout by organizations identified as the 5th Tank Battalion, 22nd Tank Regiment, 21st Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion, 125th Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion, 25th Anti-tank Battalion, 155th Panzer Artillery Regiment, 1151st General Artillery Battalion and 1152nd General Headquarters Artillery Battalion.*

Earlier attempts had been made to restore the main line of resistance when at 1330 on 9 January, Company "A", 48th Tank Battalion (Combat Command "A") was sent from Kuhlendorf to Rittershoffen with the mission of assisting the 242nd Infantry in straightening the line. An unknown number of enemy tanks were reported at that time to be flanking Rittershoffen from the south, while to the north German personnel carriers and tanks were maneuvering into position. At approximately 1420 one platoon ("A" - 48th Tank Battalion) went into position on the south flank east of Rittershoffen to meet the threat of the Nazi southern envelopment. The platoon consisting of four medium tanks engaged sixteen German tanks

* - G-2 Report, 14th Armored Division.



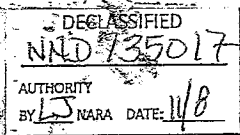
and took the enemy under fire. Six medium sized enemy tanks were knocked out without the loss of neither American men nor equipment.¹ The remainder of all the German armor fled eastward. With its position stable in Rittershoffen, elements of the 242nd Infantry and 48th Tank Battalion planned a coordinated attack on Hatten. The attack jumped off at 1710, January 9 with one platoon of tanks and one platoon of infantry advancing to the east of either side of Hatten. The assault on the northern flank of Hatten met little opposition and established itself on the north edge of town. The attack on the south side encountered some resistance, knocked out one tank, one personnel carrier and a staff car. The western² most portion of Hatten was then secured. Relief of Company "A", 48th Tank Battalion was made at 2230, 9 January with a tank destroyer platoon of the 827th Tank Destroyer Battalion and "F" and "G" Companies of the 315th Infantry in town.³ The enemy was still strongly positioned in the west of Hatten after previously driving the 242nd into the western part of Hatten⁴, which is a story within itself.

1 - Hdqs, 48th Tank Bn, 9 Jan 45, /s/ Major James N. Studer S-3.

2 - Ibid.

3 - Hdqs, 48th Tank Bn, "Activities - 9 Jan 1945" /s/ James N. Studer S-3

4 - S-2 Report, 79th Infantry Division.



At 0830 January 10 Company "A", 48th Tank Battalion was given the mission of capturing the terrain on either side of the road running southeast out of Hatten. This action would have cut one of the enemy's main arteries of supply into ⁵ Hatten. Shortly after the attack jumped off, "A" Company's (48th Tank Battalion) mission was changed in order to counteract the threat of an impending enemy attack to the northwest of Hatten. ⁶ The bulk of "A" Company moved to stop the attack to the northwest, leaving a covering force to contain the enemy on the south side of Hatten.

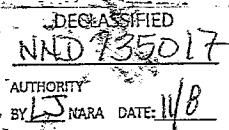
"A" Company (48th Tank Battalion) then assisted the 315th Infantry in repelling an attack of approximately two hundred infantry and six tanks. ⁷ One German tank was knocked out with one probable and the enemy attack was successfully repulsed. At noon the remainder of the 48th Tank Battalion closed in the Niederbetschdorf area. At approximately 1530, "B" Company, 48th Tank Battalion was in battle position directly south of Rittershoffen and "C" Company 48th Tank Battalion moved into battle position north and east of Rittershoffen.

Probing infantry patrols were sent to the railroad station

5 - See Map.

6 - Operation Report, 48th Tank Bn, 10 Jan 45.

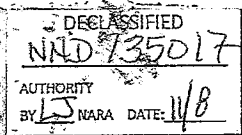
7 - Ibid.



(17.8 - 33.2) and found the place strongly defended. Other patrols found that the major portion of Hatten was occupied except for the southwestern part.⁸ At approximately 1600 the 2nd Battalion, 315th Infantry and tanks from "B" Company, 48th Tank Battalion attacked through the gap between Hatten and the woods to the south. The assault progressed in spite of intense small arms, machine gun and cannon fire from the enemy. This fire came from the southwest edge of Hatten. One tank strongly defended by German riflemen and machine gun fire was destroyed by a bazooka team from Company "F", 315th Infantry and another by tanks of "B" Company, 48th Tank Battalion.⁹ The enemy quickly replaced their losses and hostile fire from the southeast of Hatten knocked out the leading American tank. Communications on two platoon leaders' tanks failed. Four American tanks were hit by fire from the vicinity of Hatten. At 1735 the units were¹⁰ ordered to withdraw from the attack.

Meanwhile "C" Company, 48th Tank Battalion and Infantrymen of the 315th Infantry Regiment attacked to the northeast of Hatten with the objective of seizing the high

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- 8 - Operations Report - 48th Tank Bn, 10 Jan 45.
 - 9 - S-2 Report, 315th Infantry Regiment.
 - 10 - Operations Report - 48th Tank Bn, 10 Jan 45.



ground on either side of the road to the northeast of Patten,¹¹ thereby cutting the German's connecting link with Stundwiller. The enemy was well entrenched in this sector with tanks and AT guns. Six enemy tanks were hit with AP (75 mm) ammo which did not ricochet but the extent of their damage is unknown. Three American tanks were disabled by the enemy's AT and tank fire. This attack was called off at the same time as the one to the south of Hatten. After withdrawing, the tanks outposted positions on the eastern edge of Rittershoffen¹² beginning at 1730, 10 January.

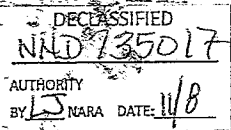
Enemy reinforcements were brought into Hatten during¹³ the early hours of 11 January. An intense artillery concentration preceded an attack on Rittershoffen. The enemy assault was launched with infantry using draws to the northeast of Rittershoffen as avenues of approach. Kraut infantrymen managed to infiltrate into Rittershoffen on the north¹⁴ and east sides where they were reinforced by tanks. Using tanks and half tracks for local security the enemy infantry gained control of the northern and eastern portion of Rittershoffen. Small but bitter engagements of CCA and the 3rd

11 - See Map.

12 - Operations Report - 48th Tank Bn, 10 Jan 1945.

13 - S-2 Journal, 315th Infantry Regiment.

14 - Ibid.



Battalion, 315th Infantry were fought with the enemy who
¹⁵
 held on tenaciously.

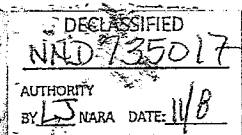
At daylight 12 January CCA and the 315th Infantry Regiment were to exert heavy pressure on Rittershoffen and screen the passage of CCB whose mission was to seize Hatten from the north with one battalion allowing the passage of
¹⁶
 a following battalion to cut roads east of Hatten. The attack was intended to restore the VI Corps' MLR and thus relieve elements of the 2nd Battalion, 315th Infantry Regiment and remnants of the 2nd Battalion, 242nd Infantry which were isolated in the westerly most buildings of Hatten. These troops had suffered heavily from enemy attacks since
¹⁷
 9 January 1945.

A fifteen minute American artillery concentration fell on the southeast edge of Rittershoffen while CCA poised for the attack at 0750 12 January. After the artillery barrage, tanks from the 48th Tank Battalion brought fire on the southeast edge of Rittershoffen to support foot soldiers who attacked at 0840 and were repulsed by small arms fire from the
¹⁸
 enemy. 48th Tank Battalion armor brought more fire into

15 - S-2 Journal, 315th Infantry Regiment.

16 - S-3, 14th Armored Div, Lt Col Joseph C. Lambert.

17 - Ibid.



the area southeast of Rittershoffen and lost two medium
¹⁹
tanks by AT guns in the procedure. Neither tanks nor
Infantry succeeded in driving the Germans from their strong-
²⁰
ly held positions on the southeastern side of Rittershoffen.
Tanks and infantrymen of CCA joined the 3rd Battalion, 315th
Infantry in consolidating positions on the western and south-
western side of Rittershoffen. Two companies of the 48th
Tank Battalion (CCA) withdrew to Niederbetschdorf during the
²¹
evening. CCB was unsuccessful in its attempt to flank
Hatten from the north. A large dug in force of enemy infan-
try supported by tanks and heavy artillery fire broke up the
advance to the north of Rittershoffen. CCB established a de-
fensive position north of Rittershoffen along the road leading
to Leiterswiller. CCB did not advance beyond this position
²²
during the resulting days. The 2nd Battalion of the 315th
Infantry (79th Div) and remnants of the 242nd Infantry (42nd
Div) were still cut off in west Hatten. The 312th Field Artil-
²³
lery Battalion fired medical supplies into these units.

During the darkness of 12-13 January, Combat Command

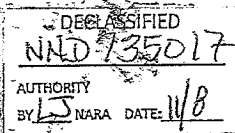
19 - Operations of 48th Tank Bn, Hdqs, 12 Jan 45, /s/
Major James N. Studer.

20 - Ibid

21 - Ibid

22 - S-3 Journal, CCA, 14th Armored Division.

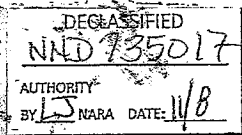
23 - History of Headquarters 79th Division Artillery,
1 January - 31 January 1945.



Reserve, commanded by Colonel D. H. Hodelson ~~Radeston~~, was moved into Niederbetschdorf and prepared to attack Patten from the south on the morning of 13 January 1945. This effort, if successfully completed, would ~~cut~~ off the German troops in Rittershoffen and restore the main line of resistance.²⁴

Preparatory to crossing the line of departure, which was the road running south from Rittershoffen (vic 16-33) the 19th AIB (CCR) deployed with "A" Company on the left, "B" Company on the right and "C" Company in reserve. Upon reaching the open field enemy fire was directed at the Americans from Southeast Rittershoffen. To avoid this fire, the assault Battalion was moved hurriedly to defilade on the southern side of the railroad tracks. "A" Company retained their position in the field, some men using ditches along the line of departure for protection. "B" Company, to the right rear of "A" Company, pulled into the woods south of the railroad tracks to avoid a concentration of tracer and ball ~~and~~ fire from enemy automatic weapons, which was also coming from the southern portion of Rittershoffen. The woods, although sparsely ^{covered} ~~with~~ with large trees, afforded adequate protection for "B" Company. These same woods were being screened by the 94th

24 - 19th AIB Journal, 14th Armored Division.

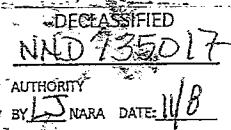


Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron.

As a result of this harassing fire the jump off was detained approximately ten minutes. However, the companies soon reorganized, directed small arms against Ritteshoffen and pressed eastward. Friendly artillery laid smoke to cover the advance of the attack.

The field stretched before the attacking companies offered little in the way of protection. The flat open terrain was only broken by furrows lightly covered with snow. The plowed field stretched east toward Hatten rising in a gradual slope to the north of Hatten where the enemy was well entrenched. The Germans were using "Magenot Line" pillboxes, for the protection of anti-tank guns. These pill-boxes were strategically located and protected any attempt at the high ground to the north of Hatten and the flat area to the east of Hatten. These formidable defenses were well used to hold what the enemy had gained and to keep the Americans from interrupting the flow of supplies and reinforcements, which came in ~~from~~ via the roads south, east and north of Hatten.

"A" company, 19th AIB, making slightly faster progress, pressed the assault and reached a line approximately 300 yards west of the railroad station (17.6-33.3) where heavy mortar, artillery, small arms and automatic weapon fire



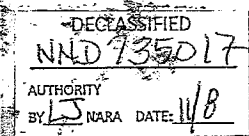
halted their advance. This fire was coming from the buildings on the southeastern side of Hatten as well as from dug in enemy positions in the same area.

Meanwhile "B" Co had pulled back slightly at the jump off to relieve the bunched up situation, which then existed. "B" Company worked forward, drawing small arms fire from the cemetery (18-33) to its front. At the same time enemy 88mm²⁵ and AT fire began falling on the men in the field. The infantrymen called for tank support and 2nd Lt Gray Thoron (~~was~~) radioed via SCR 300 for the vital armor to come forward.

Five medium tanks, "C" Company, 37th Tank Battalion moved across the field supported by direct tank fire from the remaining two platoons of "C" Company, which were firing their 75mm and 76mm cannons into the southern edge of Hatten. Other tanks from the 48th Tank Battalion were also firing ~~at~~ Hatten and Rittershoffen from the same position.

The five tanks commanded by 2nd Lt Seth Sprague proceeded boldly across the open field in column formation to give closer support to "A" and "B" Companies of the 19th AIB. The assault armor drew heavy fire as it sped eastward. The tanks followed a route approximately 200 yards south of the railroad tracks. Germans pumped AT and artillery fire from the direction

25 - 19th AIB Journal.

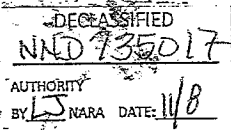


of Hatten. All the infantrymen hugged the earth in the face of this fire directed at the tanks. Pfc James R. Benzinger, "B" Company, viewed the "sickening sight of a helmet spinning end over end some forty feet in the air". The helmet belonged to pfc Zolen Newman, victim of a direct hit by an 88mm AP shell. Fire from the same type weapon knocked out three of five tanks before the other two were forced to withdraw. No one was seen leaving the stricken tanks, two of which burned immediately.²⁶ The withdrawing tanks took up another firing position. After traveling westward approximately two hundred yards, the remaining two tanks of Sprague's platoon opened fire with cannon (75mm) and machine gun into the Hatten railroad station. The American tanks fired approximately ten minutes and then withdrew.²⁷ While the infantrymen were deliberating what course of action to take the enemy opened up with mortars and machine gun fire, inflicting casualties on the foottroops spread out across the field and sheltered in vacated enemy slit trenches and fox-holes. Radio contact was attempted by both "A" and "B" Companies but these devices failed to function properly.

several tries were made to press the advance but extremely heavy enemy artillery, mortar, machine gun and small arms

26 - 1st Lt Russell T. Blair, "B" Co, 19th AIB.

27 - Ibid.



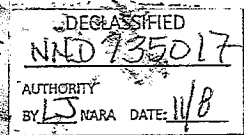
fire broke up the infantry endeavors. Tanks from another platoon of "A" Company, 47th Tank Battalion attempted to take the same route that Lt Sprague's tanks had used in an effort to aid the infantrymen. Of the five tanks sent forward, four were knocked out and the fifth was forced to withdraw under heavy fire.

Aid men administered first aid to the wounded and were not deliberately fired upon by the enemy. ²⁸ Any other movement of the troops however, brought down small arms and machine gun fire from Hatten.

The 2nd and 3rd platoons of "A" Company receiving the brunt of the enemy fire began to withdraw. This action was unknown to Capt Ernest M. Spokes, Commanding Officer, "A" Company, who, with other men, had sought refuge in a vacated enemy bunker on the open field. In the bunker with Spokes was 2nd Lt Robert L. Palecek, 499th Field Artillery Battalion who was vainly attempting to adjust smoke and fire on the southern edge of Hatten to shield the troops. ²⁹ Palecek was using an SCR 300, and because of communication difficulty was not successful in his attempt.

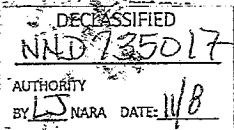
28 - 2nd Lt Gray Thoran, "B" Co, 19th AIB.

29 - 19th AIB Journal.



When the platoons of "A" Company withdrew, the north flank of "B" Company was left exposed. Realizing this, and having no radio contact Lt Thoran ordered T/Sgt J. Conray to contact Captain Thomas E. Conbay, Commanding Officer, Company "B" who was positioned at the edge of the woods. (16.9-32.6) In order to make himself as light as possible Sgt Conray duffed his gas mask, rifle and all other heavy equipment. The Sgt ran under fire until exhausted then rested. After racing approximately 250 yards the Sgt reached Capt Conbay in a state of complete prepiration. When he had regained his breath, Conray gave the company's situation in five words, "Piss poor, gotta' get out." Capt Conbay tried to contact battalion for permission to withdraw his company.

Meanwhile 1st Lt Russell T. Blair (Merkel Texas) commanding "B" Company men in the field, gave the order for withdrawal to his men. Blair assumed that "A" Company had received a withdrawal notice and because he had no communication did not know otherwise. Realizing "B" Company's left flank was exposed by "A" Company's departure, Blair established machine gun and small arms as a base of fire and sent the wounded men back first. Light machine gunners Pfc Roy Thompson and Pfc Andrew Fatcheck, both laid down an able protecting cover with 30 caliber while all of "B" Company

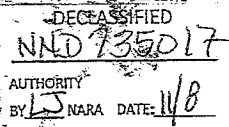


infiltrated back. Thompson had no tripod for his weapon so he laid it on the edge of a vacated Jerry fox-hole to support the vibration. Thompson kept up this fire even after being injured.

As "B" Company withdrew BAR-man Ian Radley was all over the field helping wounded men get started to the rear. ³⁰ With the exception of Capt Spokes and his men in the bunker, "A" and "B" Companies reached the edge of the woods where the difficult task of reorganizing the men began. A defensive line was set up, approximately 1000 yards southeast of the line of defense in Foret D'Aschbruck where the troops began to dig in. Rations ammo, radios and other equipment lost or destroyed in the fight on the field were brought up to the men.

Captain Spokes and his men remained in the dugout. There were thirteen soldiers in all with the "A" Company Commander, including six casualties, three of whom were litter cases. The injured men had crawled into the bunker in a state of shock and were then treated of injury. To relieve their nervous tension, Capt Spokes assured the men that the situation was well in hand, knowing full well that their position was desperate. Several more men squirmed into one shelter

30 - Capt Ernest M. Spokes, CO, Co "A", 19th AIB.



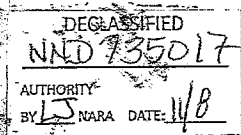
of the bunker to boost the total to seventeen men.

One of these men, Pfc Marlowe D. Gebhart said, "Captain Spokes, I'll have to sign a statement of charges for the carbine I lost" and then held up the stump of a hand that had been holding the lost carbine. After receiving first aid, Gebhart kidded with the rest of the men and helped to keep up their spirits.

The additional men did not help the already crowded situation in the bunker which was approximately ten feet long, five feet wide and three feet deep. "But it sure felt good to get off that field and into the ground." ³¹ Radio contact was unsuccessfully attempted with the 19th AIB by Lt Palecek, the artillery forward observer, to get smoke placed on the southern edge of Hatten so the remaining men in the field could withdraw. Getting nowhere with the radio, Lt Palecek asked Capt Spokes if he could try to make it back across the field to get the badly needed smoke. Spokes agreed and Palecek took off under fire. He finally made it back.

Captain Spokes attempted to get the SCR 300 in working order. Contact was finally established and at approximately 1500 smoke began to fall. Palecek's voice was heard over the radio, saying, "get ready to make a break for it, as the tanks

³
31-Sgt Jack B. Mooney, Younkers, N.Y.



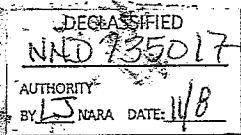
come up." At the same time a platoon of tanks from "A" Company, 47th Tank Battalion passed Spokes' position, laying 75 and 76mm cannon and machine gun fire on the enemy. Spokes withdrew his group in spite of enemy small arms and mortar fire.

Schrapnel marked, jeep ambulances evacuated the wounded from the open field amidst spasmodic enemy fire. An advance aid station was established at the railroad station. (16.0-32.9) Initial treatment and plasma was administered to the patients. Sixty two casualties were carried into this advance aid station by vehicles and litter teams from the field. Wounded were questioned as to location of other men whom they had seen hit. Some of the men exaggerated the number but every clue was traced until all wounded were cared for.

About 1530 American tanks and 75 - 100 Americans soldiers proceeded from the western end of Hatten south to the railroad tracks and then west to the line of departure. These men were remnants of the 242nd Infantry who had been badly battered in Hatten. The men of the 242nd Infantry took up positions in the Foret D'Aschbruck.³²

At 1600 troops of "A" and "B" and "C" Companies loaded 15 to 20 men each on the light and medium tanks of the 47th.

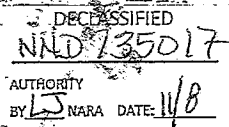
32 - See map.



Tank Battalion and started toward Hatten. Small arms and machine gun fire opened on the column from the southeastern edge of Hatten, but caused no known casualties. The mounted infantrymen could see burned out American and German tanks littering their entire route across the open field.³³ These KO'd tanks were a result of previous engagements and the present one being waged for the town of Hatten and Rittershoffen.³⁴

Light enemy artillery and mortar fire followed the tanks across the field. As the armor got closer to town enemy mortar fire increased in volume and accuracy forcing the infantry to dismount approximately 300 yards from town. The medium tanks went into Hatten via "Y" Street which was later used as a supply route, and the rest withdrew to the vicinity of the line of defense. The dismounted infantry made their way to the southwestern side of town where contact was established with the 315th Infantry Battalion. Men of both Battalions took up defensive positions within the badly battered houses on both sides of Main Street and "Y" Street to a point approximately 17.4-33.7.³⁵ The 19th

33 - See Map.
 34 - 19th AIB Journal
 35 - See Map.

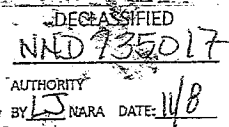


AIB troops were split up among the 315th infantrymen so the newcomers would benefit by the experience of the soldiers already in Hatten.

A platoon of "C" Company 19th AIB, situated on the north side of main street received a local enemy attack during the night. The enemy came in from the north and with tanks and bazooka fire blasted the platoon out of the house they were occupying. The "C" Company platoon took up a defensive position in a house on the south side of main street. Amidst the blaze and confusion three Germans followed the platoon into the house. The Krauts threw hand grenades and blasted away with "burp" guns. Sgt Durwood Mafford heard one of the Krauts holler in clear English, "Why don't you Yankee bastards give up?" In reply to this question the Americans opened up with small arms and BAR fire from within the darkened hallway. The boisterous German fell dead still clutching and American M-1 rifle.³⁶ The other two fled and the local enemy attack subsided.

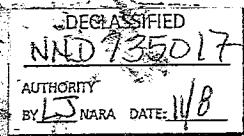
At approximately 2300, 2nd Lt Walter Dickerson, communications officer, contacted Lt Blair in order to get four men to help carry wire from two light tanks which had pulled

³⁶ - Many Germans were using equipment captured from the 242nd Regiment when they were forced to withdraw hurriedly.



into the southern edge of "Y" Street, now serving as the main supply and evacuation route for Hatten. Dickerson got the four men and started down "Y" Street. The group of Americans were surprised by five Germans who stepped from behind a building with hands raised and said, "Kamerad". Dickerson called Blair to take the PW's off his hands so they could continue after the wire. Blair's men searched and questioned the Krauts. One of the PW's said they were five of a nine man patrol. The remaining Boche showed up in a house occupied by "C" Company. One of the Germans stepped out of the kitchen into the dining room occupied by the Americans. This German said, "Kamerad". The Kraut was told to step into the room. When he did a Jerry to the rear opened up with a "burp" gun directed at the Americans. The German missed his mark and he and the others fled. Pvt Choddick shot the German who had said "Kamarad" and then fired at the fleeing group, accounting for one more. Other incidents of the same nature were prevalent throughout the campaign.

Dead Germans were strewn all over the area and were used as decoys by enemy patrols who attempted to infiltrate into American positions. GI's were very conscious of the closeness of the enemy during the night.

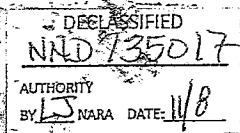


The dark hours seemed to be ten times as long as the daylight hours. A constant vigil was maintained in a perimeter defense. Fox-holes were dug on all sides of house foundations. These holes were used to prevent the enemy from getting into the protective rubble of the buildings. The men in the extreme western part of Hatten felt uneasy about the enemy troops in Rittershoffen. ³⁷ The Germans held the eastern part of Rittershoffen which was approximately one-half mile away connecting with Hatten by means of a first class road on a slight gradient.

Plans were made for a coordinated attack on the northern road running east and west in Hatten. ³⁸ With this section of Hatten in American hands the protected enemy route north of Hatten to Rittershoffen would be under control. Both tanks and infantry were to combine their efforts in an attempt to drive the enemy from this sector of Hatten on the morning of 14 January. After medium tanks of the 47th Tank Battalion had moved into position to support the attack, "A" Company of the 19th AIB and "E" Company of the 315th Infantry Regiment jumped off. "A" Company flanked the northern street from the west while "E" Company came up from the southeast.

37 - 1st Lt Russell T. Blair, "B" Co, 19th AIB.

38 - See map.



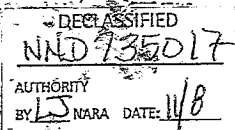
The plan was to join in a pincer movement enveloping the street from both ends while the tanks drove up the middle. ³⁹

Bazooka, machine gun and small arms fire met the American attack. One of the tanks was hit but continued forward until surrounded by the enemy. The armored crew were taken prisoner. Wounded men of the tank were treated by the Germans as the infantry pressed the attack and finally drove the enemy back. A defense was set up occupying a clump of houses on the north-western end of Hatten on the northern street running east and west.

At approximately 2100 "A" and "C" Companies received a severe attack from German infantry who swarmed down from the slope to the north of their positions. This enemy assault was supported by tank fire from the north and east as well as mortar fire from the same directions. ⁴⁰ One enemy tank worked its way west on the northern east-west street. Another eased down from the high ground to the north. The result was a terrific cross fire of 88mm and machine gun bullets. Jerry pressed his advance as the Americans were forced to withdraw from the houses which the enemy set afire using

39 - Capt Ernest M. Spokes, CO, Co "A" 19th AIB.

40 - Ibid.

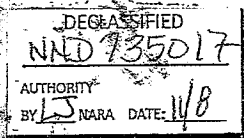


incendiary bullets and flame throwers. After the buildings caught fire civilians tried to leave their hiding places in the cellars. The civilians made the mistake of exposing themselves in the street. When they did, German fire cut them down. A group of Alsatian men, women and children became entrapped in the basement of a smashed building. The Krauts turned the nozzle of a flame thrower into the building on the imprisoned civilians. The resulting screams of horror and pain could be heard over the noisy tanks, cannon and machine gun fire.⁴¹

Both companies made their way westward, "mouseholing". This term is used when crawling through the blown out sides and windows of buildings rather than running from one building to another. This method was a safer means of moving up and down the streets. The units worked their way south to the main street joining up with the other companies occupying the houses there. Heavy American artillery fire broke up Jerry's attack. The units consolidated their positions.

At approximately 1730 a strong enemy attack commenced from the west and drove "F" Company out of three houses they were holding east of "Y" intersection. "B" Company was sent

41 - Men of "A" and "B" Companies, 19th AIB.



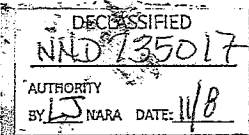
42

forward and successfully contained the enemy.

In order to regain the three houses that "F" Company had lost, 2nd Lt Richard M. Yound Jr, commanding "C" Company was ordered to counterattack as soon as he could get his forces together. Due to an intense artillery and mortar barrage laid down by the enemy, it was some time before the men were coordinated. By the time "C" Company was ready to jump off, two medium tanks of "A" Company, 47th Tank Battalion were positioned on main street to support the attack. Four more tanks stayed in the rear as covering fire. At 1915 all units began their advance through the rubble of houses lining both sides of the main street. Close contact was necessary due to the poor visibility in the darkness which was not helped any by the smoke and dust which enemy HE shells were kicking up. Demolished buildings blocked the path of the Americans. Smoldering ashes blinded and choked the men as they inched forward. A medium tank kept pace with the men of "C" Company and slowly clanked up the rubble littered main street.

At "Y" intersection the advancing units were halted in anticipation of making close contact with the enemy in the next few moments. The tanks sought the cover of "Y" street

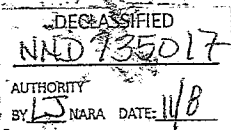
42 - 2nd Lt Gray Thoron, "B" Co, 19th AIB.



running south off main street. As the group moved forward once more the tank jockeyed into a position which found it silhouetted against a burning building. From the west end of main street, two 75mm rounds from an American tank found their marks in the turret and engine compartment of the tank at "Y" intersection, barely distinguishable in the smoky haze. These 75mm rounds came from an American tank parked on the western outskirts of Hatten who thought the silhouetted tank to be enemy.⁴³ The stricken tank caught fire. Small arms and 75mm shells within the vehicle began to explode. "C" Company men on the south side of main street were reluctant to pass the exploding armor. After hesitating momentarily the infantrymen swung south of the buildings on main street and passed the blazing tank. Lt Young went back to bring up another tank to support his men who continued forward. The relief tanker did not think he could make it past the burning tank which was by this time an inferno. Young pleaded⁴⁴ with the tanker and finally convinced him that he could get past by gunning his own tank in a burst of speed. The tanker said, "OK, I'll try".

Meanwhile "C" Company had "mouseholed" through the

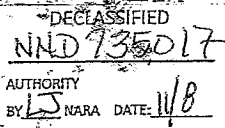
43 - 2nd Lt Richard M. Young, Jr, "C" Co, 19th AIB
 44 - Ibid.



devastated buildings until enemy bazooka, intense small arms and machine gun fire halted their forward motion. The supporting tank relieved the situation by speeding past the burning tank and firing into the enemy. "C" Company again pressed forward. The tank pulled to the south side of main street out of the field of fire from the slight bend in the road ahead. This bend was the crucial point in the entire village. Jerry tanks were around the eastern side of the bend, American armor commanded the western side of the bend. American or German tanks dared not protrude more than the barrel of their cannon around either side of the corner.

After gaining the rubble of two more buildings on both sides of main street the enemy once more held up the advance with bazooka, machine gun and small arms fire.

The American medium again came forward and fired its 75mm and machine gun into suspected enemy positions. The Germans quickly retaliated with a barrage of bazooka fire which forced the tank to withdraw. In an effort to flank the enemy from the south, Capt Harold S. Persky led a platoon of tanks (Co "C", 47th Tk Bn) to the south of the main street in Hatten. Three of these tanks were knocked out by German bazooka and artillery fire. The remaining two tanks

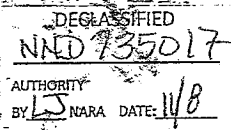


withdrew to the assembly area at the foot of "Y" Street. ⁴²

The 2nd and AT platoons of "C" Company combined into one unit. The total of twenty men were brought up to aid the other platoons of "C" Company. These support units enabled their parent organization to gain one more building thus securing all that "F" Company had lost. The operation had taken five hours to accomplish and "C" Company men were weary as they made ready to hold what was left of the ground they had captured.

A German counterattack was not long in coming. One hour later an enemy force infiltrated from the north into the 3rd platoon's ("C" Co) positions. In the face of bazooka and "burp" gun fire, the platoon withdrew to the rear. This action left the men of "C" Company on the southern side of main street, with an exposed left flank. To overcome this situation, the men moved to the rear approximately 75 yards, where they drew abreast of the 3rd platoon on the northern side of main street. The units held good fields of fire over the desolated waste of the broken buildings in this spot and decided to hold. The enemy attempted to advance westward

42 - Marked "X" on the map.



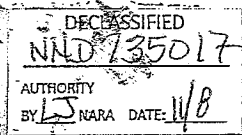
but was quickly dispersed with hand grenades, BAR and small arms fire. "C" Company spent the remainder of the night munching "K" rations and good naturedly "bitching" about the battle of Hatten, the army as a whole and all things in general. This action was typical of the small unit engagements in the enduring days. Americans would attack and win several shattered buildings. Then the Germans would counterattack. If the enemy infantry could not advance, their tanks and artillery came to support them. This was true of both sides in the see-saw struggle for Hatten⁴³, as well as Rittershoffen.⁴⁴

During the dark hours of the morning, elements of "A" Company of the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron reinforced "C" Company in their forward position. The enemy continued to fire intermittent small arms, machine gun, bazooka, mortar and artillery ~~fire~~ into the western edge of Hatten. One of the artillery rounds accounted for another medium tank of "A" Company parked on the western outskirts of Hatten.

Much of the battle was an artillery duel between the Americans and Germans. All through the period losses were

43 - Pfc James R. Benzinger.

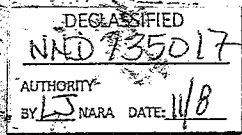
44 - S-2 Report, 315th Infantry Regiment.



sustained on both sides by the constant pounding of artillery pieces firing HE, W/P and AP ammunition. As many as fifteen American field artillery battalions fired at one time on Hatten during the ensuing days.⁴⁵ Artillery shells with delay-edifuzes went clear to the cellars of enemy occupied houses before exploding. White phosphorous was used by both Americans and Germans. The enemy was using white phosphorous apparently captured previously from other units, because⁴⁶ they do not have any of their own.

Illustrative of the amount of artillery thrown into the general area of Hatten and Rittershoffen are the figures⁴⁷ taken from the 499th and 500th Field Artillery Battalions. These two field artillery battalions fired approximately 3400 rounds of high explosive and approximately 400 rounds of white phosphorous from light artillery pieces (105mm Howitzers) on different days during the battle. Everything including 60 and 80mm mortars, 105 S/P guns and howitzers, 155 mm guns and howitzers, 240mm howitzers and 8" guns were used by American artillery to harass and repel the Germans. VI Corps artillery, in addition to other supporting units

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- 45 - Major Forest T. Green, CO, 19th AIB.
 - 46 - G-2 Report, 79th Div, and 14th Arm'd Div.
 - 47 - S-3 Report, 14th Arm'd Div Artillery.

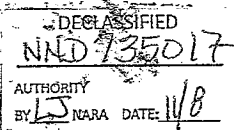


fired on the area - Hatten and Rittershoffen from the period
⁴⁸
 9 January to 20 January.

At 0600 15 January, Major Forest T. Green, CO of 19th AIB informed Lt Young via SCR 300 that "E" Company of the 315th Infantry would attack through "C" Company's positions. At 0815 assault formations of "E" Company came down the main street to "C" Company's positions. Lt Young called to the officer in charge and gave him the situation. He added a word of caution about getting the attacking forces into the protection of the rubble. The officer nodded approval
⁴⁹
 but kept his men on the street. "E" Company continued down the avenue approximately 50 yards east of "C" Company's position where enemy machine gun, bazooka, "burp" guns, small arms fire and flame throwers inflicted extremely heavy casualties on the attacking soldiers.
⁵⁰
 The intense fire caused the men of "E" Company to withdraw. They did so under the supporting fire of "C" Company.

While "E" Company was withdrawing Lt Young was called to Battalion Headquarters to tell what had happened. The lieutenant worked his way back to the CP located in the cellar of a blasted building. Young spoke above the pathetic

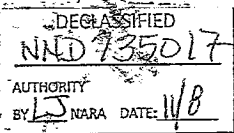
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- 48 - Colonel Maurice K. Kantz, 14th Arm'd D.A.C.
 - 49 - Lt Richard M. Young, Jr, "C" Co, 19th AIB.
 - 50 - History, 79th Div Artillery, 1 Jan - 31 Jan 1945.



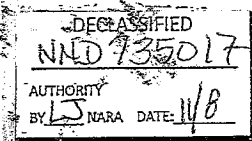
whimpering of the injured men who lay on the floor. He told the group of battalion staff officer what he had seen. Major Green then said, "Young, you'll have to make the attack, since "E" Company has failed". The lieutenant replied, "Sir, how do you think my men will feel after seeing what happened to "Easy" Company?". Major Green thought a moment then said, "All right, we'll see Lt Col Earl F. Holton. The two officers went back to Colonel Holton's CP located in the cellar of a blown out building. The men made their way down the rubble laden stairs into a crowded smoky room, miserably lighted by a few candles. Major Green explained the situation to Colonel Holton. The colonel listened and very emphatically said, "Charlie company WILL attack."

Lt Young informed his platoon leaders of the circumstances. One said, "Are we the only Goddamn company in the Army?" another platoon leader added, "~~why these silly bastards~~". Young cut them short by saying, "Yeah, I know, but we're going anyway." To support the attack the AT and 2nd platoons formed a heavy base of fire with machine guns, BARs and rifles. The 1st and 3rd platoons jumped off. The men were made as they crouched low and plodded through the rubble.

51 - Commanding Officer of 2nd Battalion, 315th Infantry, in charge of all elements in Hatten.



of the buildings. Their anger must have helped because the enemy was routed out and "C" Company again reached the ruins they had been forced to evacuate the night before. Not a man in "C" Company was hit during the attack. The men felt better as they again prepared to hold what they had. The soldiers took up positions behind corners of blown out walls, heavy fallen timber and other debris offering protection in the semblance of the houses and barns they were occupying. The stay was again short lived when the Germans attacked in force with bazookas, rifle grenades, small arms and machine gun fire. A medium tank attempted to support the Americans and came forward through the rubble. The tank fired two rounds from its 75mm before heavy bazooka fire forced its withdrawal. After the American tank departed "C" Company was also forced to withdraw in the face of heavy enemy fire of all descriptions. The Germans followed "C" Company back until "B" Company was brought up to stop the enemy. Two Tiger tanks made their appearance from the west. American tanks and tank destroyers attempted to get into positions to battle the Tigers, but were prevented by one of the firing Panzer vehicles. The other enemy tank fired into the buildings that American infantrymen were "mouseholing" through. A German light machine gun crew maneuvered down from the



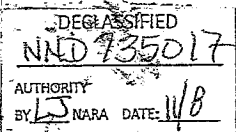
north. The Germans were hidden behind a manure pile and were firing their weapon down an alley between two buildings. This fire prevented the men from "mouseholing" past the alley. Lt Blair saw one of the Germans' legs protruding from behind the manure pile. Blair carefully estimated the distance from the end of the German's foot to the apparent position of his body. The lieutenant pumped three rounds from his carbine through the manure pile. He heard the German scream. The other Kraut took off.

Enemy tracer bullets from the east were fired into the combination of houses and barns which are prevalent throughout the Alsatian area. Hay within the barns soon caught fire. The Americans used the smoke to advantage since it covered their withdrawal. At the same time several P-47s strafed and bombed the eastern section of Hatten as well as the high ground to the north of town.⁵² The combination of planes and artillery took the impetus from the enemy attack. American infantrymen established themselves in the proximity of the first street running north, west of "Y" intersection.

An OP was established in a building called the "Fort". This concrete structure was located on the southern side of main street just east of "Y" intersection.⁵³ The "Fort" had

52 - Lt Russell T. Blair Co "B"; S/Sgt Edward S. Pidgeon, Sgt Earle A. Simpson, 47th Tk Bn.

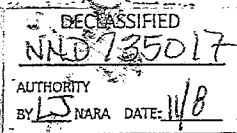
53 - See Map.



been hit by artillery, tank and mortar fire. It looked it. Gaping holes were in the eastern and northern sides of the walls. Snow covered the blasted floors within the edifice. The roof was a thing of the past as were the windows, shutters and black-out blinds. "B" Company and a platoon of "C" Company occupied the "Fort's" three undamaged ~~rooms~~^{rooms} on the western side of the building. From the shattered upstairs section of the "Fort", a constant vigil was maintained for enemy activity. In the cellar aid men worked over the many wounded who could not be evacuated. Between the "Fort" and the first street to the east which ran north, outposts of twelve men occupied the heaping ruins of each building.

The men were a littler jittery that night and more than once fired in the direction of noises which later proved to be stray horses and other animals aimlessly wandering about the desolated village.

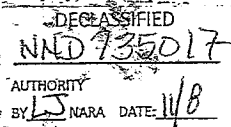
During the dark hours information was called down from the outpost that an enemy tank was approaching from the east, along main street. Its approximate location was given. Lt Young fumbled with his flashlight and artillery concentration map to determine the registration number nearest the oncoming tank. Before he got the number, the tank let fly with its 88mm at the eastern wall of the "Fort". The blast



injured several men. When the dust had settled Young discovered himself unhurt but minus map and flashlight. The lieutenant guessed at the concentration number and called the information back via SCR 300. Jerry let get with another round injuring several more men. American artillery began landing in the vicinity of the enemy tank and chased it back.

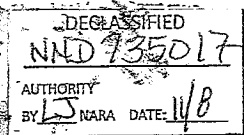
Lt Robert Lingle and Sgt Williams, both of "C" Company directed artillery fire all night at different intervals. The men brought the fire in very close attempting to catch any chance of attack on the American positions. When the artillery caught any of them, Germans could be heard screaming for help in agonized voices. As the hours wore on, their screams gave way to moaning and heavy sobbing. Jerry used an old trick in an attempt to confuse the Americans. While the American artillery was dropping on his forces, Jerry dumped a few rounds into the American positions to make it seem that our own artillery was falling short. This ruse tended to confuse anyone attempting to direct the artillery concentrations.

Behind the "Fort" was located a barn with a stone base reaching upward approximately six feet. A guard was maintained within the barn to prevent any infiltration from the south and southeast. Toward dawn on the 16th of January



pfc paul "Pop" Biesel (38 year old, ass't mail clerk) was observing through a shell hole in the wall when two Germans approached from the southeast. "Pop" was scared to death and afraid to fire for fear of missing the targets. He waited until the Krauts were ten yards from the barn before squeezing the trigger. One died instantly. It took three more rounds to finish the other.

Before dawn on the morning of 16 January a seventeen man assault platoon from "A" Company went forward to the northwest sector of Hatten to "feel-out" the enemy. The platoon routed two Germans out of a building and took them prisoners. The Jerries were "pumped". Information was gained that a force of three German companies were preparing to attack from the north and east. S/Sgt Albert Carey was sent back to inform battalion of the situation. Carey started toward the rear. The patrol continued toward the northern "east-west" road until running into the attack. 2nd Lt Joseph Osborne, in charge of the American platoon, radioed back to battalion on a static frequency, "We are being attacked by three companies of Jerries". Reception on the battalion SCR 300 was bad. The Commanding Officer, 19th AIB, thinking the message to be, "We are being attacked by THREE Jerries", radioed back, "Continue the assault". The radio went dead.



and futile attempts were made to contact the platoon once more. The assault platoon engaged in a fire fight with the leading elements of the three company infantry attack.

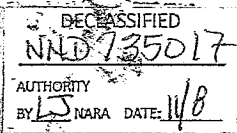
Meanwhile Sgt Carey arrived at battalion headquarters. The sergeant informed Major Greene of the impending enemy drive which was being spear-headed with bazookas, machine guns and "burp" guns.

All companies were warned of the grave situation. Lt Colonel James Woodie Lann, Commanding Officer of the 47th Tank Battalion was obliged to dispense with the plans he had made to provide a diversionary attack on one flank of Rittershoffen, while COA attacked Rittershoffen from a different direction. Tanks were rushed to Hatten, where six more of the 47th Tank Battalion's vehicles were lost in the ensuing battle during 16 January.

Sgt Carey brought a replenishing stock of ammunition back to his platoon and also carried orders for the assault platoon to withdraw. This action was supported by fire from

54 - S-3 Journal, 47th Tank Battalion.

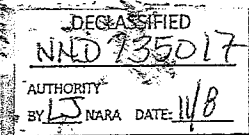
55 - As the battle for Hatten progressed during the coming days, so many tanks were lost that the 47th Tank Battalion was forced to assume a defensive attitude with supporting artillery and mortar fire - S-3 Journal, 47th Tank Battalion.



a second platoon of "A" Company which was sent forward to help in their withdrawal.

Meanwhile the Germans pulled a Tiger tank to the ground, north of Hatten overlooking the town. Another Tiger rolled up the main street. Both tanks commenced to fire into houses occupied by "B" and "C" Companies. This fire was followed by Jerry infantrymen who advanced across the rubble of the buildings firing everything in the book.

Outposts of "C" Company began to withdraw. Pvt. Howard Wierum materially aided the withdrawal by laying a supporting concentration of machine gun fire. With a belt of ammo over his shoulder, Wierum fired his light 30 cal machine gun, from the hip, through different windows of the room he was occupying. The private jokingly said, "I'm a commando" as he held the enemy at bay allowing his comrades to withdraw, "mouse-hole" style. The Tiger tank singled out this machine gun menace and fired a direct round of 88mm HE at Wierum. The private was seriously wounded. "C" Company men carried Wierum to the rear through the windows and blasted holes in the sides of the buildings. "C" Company finally arrived at positions approximately seventy five yards down the street where "B" Company engaged the enemy at an approximate distance



of fifty yards with bazookas, rocket grenades, machine gun fire, small arms and hand grenades. This fire contained the enemy until American artillery and tank fire broke up the attack.

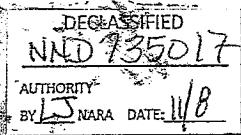
"B" Company later heard enemy activity approximately 100 yards down the street. 81mm mortar rounds were registered on the suspected German positions. Several Krauts were routed and more of the battered buildings in Hatten were set afire. Intermittant enemy artillery continued throughout the day. One of the German rounds scored a direct hit on Capt Thomas E. Conbay, killing the commander of "B" Company. 1st Lt Russell T. Blair, took charge of the company after Capt Conbay's death.

The following two days were spent beating off enemy patrols attempting to steal into American positions. Artillery from both sides found its mark, adding to the many dead who lay where they had fallen. Cold weather kept the bodies from deteriorating, preventing a stench that only decaying dead men can produce. American sentries, maintaining vigil were sometimes obliged to secure positions very close to their dead comrades for days on end.

56

An aid station was set up in Hatten to supplement the

56 - Major Forest T. Green, CO, 19th AIB.

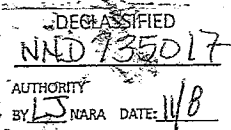


the medical supplies previously parachuted to the 315th Infantry aid men. Captain Charles Hawkins, surgeon and medical T/3 Robert Munson had been loaded into a tank with medical supplies to set up the aid station in Hatten. This was Captain Hawkins' first ride in a tank. "All the captain wanted to know about the tank was the location of the escape hatch."

Sgt Munson and his men constantly checked for casualties by going through the debris of the houses in Hatten. When locating a casualty, Munson had litter bearers carry the man back. These litter bearers did a Herculean job of carrying wounded through the blasted walls and windows of the buildings. After an enemy mortar barrage landed close, an aid man from the 315th Infantry said, "Hold up, I'm going to drop the litter". The other men suggested he use two hands instead of the one he was using to carry the litter. The tired aid man replied, "I can't" and held up the stump of his
57
other arm.

Temporary treatment was given at the aid station in Hatten. To evacuate the casualties out of the town, half tracks and light tanks were loaded with American wounded.

57 - All aid men of the 19th AIB medics told of this story but did not know the man's name.

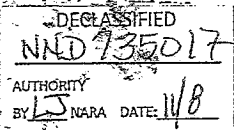


Litter cases were stretched across the backs of the tanks and on the half tracks. The vehicles took the wounded men back to Niederbetschdorf via the exit leading from "Y" street to the southwest.

The 19th AIB aid station in Niederbetschdorf was assisted by "B" Company of the 84th Medical Battalion. Even in this town the wounded were not entirely safe. On one occasion a German jet propelled plane dropped its bomb load close to the rear aid station.⁵⁸ A few injured showed fright when the windows blew out, but were soon quieted down by the medics. Steel helmets were placed on the patients and the aid men methodically began their work again.

Injured men were evacuated from Hatten during the dark hours of the nights. The route used was from "Y" street south to the railroad tracks and thence west to Niederbetschdorf. As one half track was taking its precious load of wounded to Niederbetschdorf the vehicles was struck by a German artillery round. The explosion killed the driver and wounded aid man T/5 Edward B. Powell occupying the front seat. The injured men dragged themselves away from the

⁵⁸ - Several attacks were made by German ME-262 planes. History, 79th Div Artillery, 1 Jan to 31 Jan 1945.



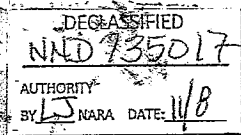
track to the shelter of the ground. After assuring themselves that all was safe, the wounded helped each other back onto the vehicle and rode into Niedbetschdorf in the darkness.

Men in the rear echelon took up a collection of the packages they had received from home. These delicacies along with hot coffee and doughnuts were sent to the fighters in Hatten. Rear echelon men of the fighting elements went to church daily to pray for their heroic comrades engaged in the battle.

Freshly killed rabbits and chicken made the fighter's "K" rations more appetizing. S/Sgt Weldon S. Shickel, (Co "A") had his mortar platoon use bed sheets for table cloths and sat down to a delicious meal while sentries guarded against the ever present Boche. When all the men had eaten, the dishes were cleared away. On the white table cloths was placed neat piles of ammo, clips, loaded magazines, bazooka rounds and hand grenades. The men were all set up for comfortable fighting.

Orders were issued to evacuate twenty shock cases from
59
each battalion in Hatten. However, since almost all the men were in a state of shock and nervousness it was decided

59 - Orders issued by Colonel D. H. Hudelston, Commanding Officer, CCR.



not to evacuate anyone in fairness to them all. The decision was approved by the fighting soldiers "who got wind of it through the usual army grapevine"⁶⁰. One man approached 1st Lt Charles B. Wallace and said in jest, "You've GOT to evacuate me sir, I've contracted a venereal disease."

Lt Thoran became infuriated at one man wasting ammunition which was already at a premium. The private was nonchalantly picking off pigeons with his M-1 while a lull existed in the battle.

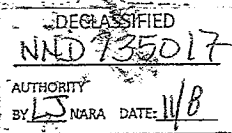
T/Sgt John M. Taylor, "B" Company saw a horse roaming near his position. The Sergeant brought the horse into a barn where he fed the animal and made it comfortable. Lt Blair asked the sergeant, "What the hell are you doing with that horse?" Sgt Taylor replied, "Just making him comfortable sir. If the Jerries attack once more, I'm going to get on this nag and pull a "Paul Revere", by racing past the OP calling 'the Jerries are coming'."⁶¹

The enemy attempted two infantry attacks on the 18th of January, one at daylight and another at dusk, supported by a flame throwing tank.⁶² Heavy American artillery concentrations broke them up, inflicting extremely heavy casualties

60 - Lt Russell T. Blair, Co "B", 19th AIB.

61 - Railroad Station, 16.0 - 32.8.

62 - History 79th Div Artillery, 1 Jan - 31 Jan 1945, S-2 Report 315th Infantry Regiment.

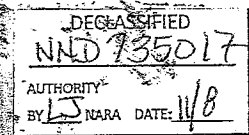


to the ~~German~~⁶³ north of Hatten. ⁶⁴ Ammunition of all types was getting critically low and every concentration had to be certain before fire was delivered. ⁶⁵ Men were cautioned about wasting small arms ammunition and making every shot count. Reconnaissance missions of American aircraft confirmed PW stories that there were approximately sixty enemy artillery batteries in front of the Hatten sector.

At approximately 0730 on the morning of 19 January the Germans opened up with everything they had in the form of tank, mortar and artillery fire. ⁶⁶ Thousands of HE and AP shells from heavy guns as well as mortar rounds burst on the American held portion of Hatten. The German's targets amounted to an area 200 yards north and south, and 400 yards east and west. The bombardment lasted continuously until 0900. "Men who had been at Anzio said they would gladly have welcome a siege on the beach in lieu of that barrage on Hatten". ⁶⁷

The rubble of Hatten was further scattered as the preponderant hammering and deafening noise continued. The air

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- 63 - History, 79th Div Artillery, 1 Jan - 31 Jan 1945.
 - 64 - Ibid.
 - 65 - Ibid.
 - 66 - 315th Infantry S-3 Journal, History 79th Div Artillery.
 - 67 - Pfc James R. Benzinger.

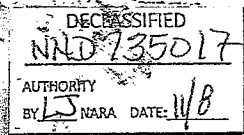


was raining dangerously with flying schrapnel, timber, stone and debris of all descriptions. Rounds smacked home everywhere, killing and maiming Americans and civilians alike.

A direct hit exploded in a house occupied by a platoon of "A" Company men and a group of civilians. The blast killed one soldier and injured five more as well as three civilians. When the noise and concussion had subsided civilian voices could be heard crying and screaming in terror. The injured soldiers moaned and sobbed quietly. One of the group, a seven year old Alsatian girl made her way to 2nd Lt Joseph Osborne, in command of the group. The little girl looked very clean in spite of her beraggled clothes. She brushed the pretty dark locks of hair that fell in disorder on her tiny shoulders and asked, "Is that the Roche?". Lt Osborne understood the German words and answered, "yes". "Are they coming?", she asked. "No", was Osborne's reply. The girl made her way quietly back to a corner and sat down as if nothing had happened. This action quieted everybody in the cellar and kept them on an even keel.

Another direct hit struck the first aid station, injuring patients situated on the first floor and cellar of a building on the western side of Hatten. One of the four shells to

68 - 2nd Lt Joseph Osborne, "A" Co, 19th AIB.



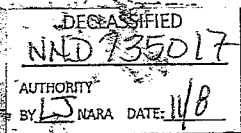
hit the building burrowed through the cellar before exploding.⁶⁹ Approximately 20 men in the aid station were threatened in the fire that started immediately. Fortunately all the men were able to evacuate themselves as the walls began to collapse in the upstairs structure. A new aid station was set up in the cellar of another building to accomodate the forty-two American casualties suffered this day. Aid kits and plasma bottles had been blown up when the aid station was initially hit. Until replenishing supplies were brought up, the aid men worked with handkerchiefs, bed sheets and strips of blankets to supplement the shortage of bandages and aid kits.⁷⁰

Many other structures were smashed and wounded men were trapped with their dead buddies under heavy timbers caved in by the terrific barrage. These injured could not work free and had to remain with their silent comrades until help came later in the day.

Realizing the Germans would probably attack when the barrage ceased, the GIs prepared to defend their desolate positions.

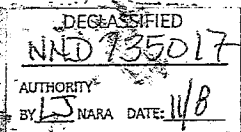
69 - Apparently a delayed action fuze.

70 - Capt Charles Hawkins, Doctor, 19th AIB.



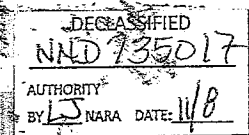
Immediately after the enemy artillery concentration ceased a German tank began to move westward on the main street while another Tiger, painted white for camouflage, prepared to flank the American positions from the southeast. The enemy tank on the main street clanked forward over the debris. This menace opened up with machine gun and 88mm fire, aided by the "burp" guns of its supporting infantry. The outposts of the American lines were pushed back until reaching both sides of the street in the vicinity of the "Fort". American tank, artillery, bazooka, machine gun, small arms fire and hand grenades prevented the enemy tanks and infantrymen from advancing through the wreckage of Main street. The spirit of the fight was exemplified by Pfc's Clayton Bronson and Rene Bessette. These men lay wounded where they had fallen, unable to move under their own power. Lt Blair told both he would evacuate the men as soon as possible. Bessette replied, "Don't both about us, stop the goddamn Jerries".

S/Sgt Casey, "C" Company, 47th Tank Battalion brought his tank forward from its mobile reserve position. Casey's tank roared ahead firing 75mm shells at the advancing enemy. Meanwhile the German tank to the south of the town worked



its way toward the barn located behind the "Fort". The Mark V opened up with a direct burst of 88mm fire into the barn. Unwounded Americans scattered in a mad melee. Lt Young on his way into the barn stepped aside to prevent ~~being~~ being trampled on. The lieutenant yelled orders but none of the men heard him. Young finally singled out S/Sgt Gregory Wiercinski and asked him for a bazooka. The sergeant said he didn't have one. Young replied, "Give me a man and I'll get one". A bazooka was quickly obtained from a "B" Company man in the next house. Before the bazooka could be put to play, the German tank, only 35 yards away, opened up with another round from its cannon. The barn trembled and then began to burn. Infantrymen attempted to flank the tank with bazookas but were singled out and blasted individually by the enemy's 88mm and machine gun. ⁷¹ Other men in the vicinity attempted to fire at the armor with bazookas. Unfortunately the orchard surrounding the enemy tank acted as protection and many of the bazooka rounds exploded against the trees separating the tank and the Americans. American artillery fire, falling close to American occupied houses, began finding its mark on the Panzer vehicle

71 - 1st Lt Russell T. Blair.



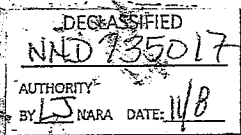
This fire, coupled with bazooka and launcher grenade fire of approximately 25 infantrymen from the "Fort" drove off the tank. But there was still a serious threat from the German infantry who were swarming in from the northeast and southeast.⁷² The German attack was led by fanatical paratroopers yelling insults such as "Yankee bastards",⁷³ while they charged, supported by tanks firing from the northeast and southeast.⁷⁴ Some of the German armor was identified as American Sherman tanks. "The 12th Armored Division lost a number of tanks some days ago, and now some of the armor is being used against us".⁷⁵ These paratroopers were of definitely superior quality and the Americans had learned to respect their fighting capabilities while in Hatten. Infantrymen took the invaders on with small arms and hand grenades. American artillery laid a terrific barrage "in close". Slick black uniforms of the young German paratroopers were ripped to shreds as the blast of American artillery smashed their bones and tore off their limbs. This same American artillery concentrated on the roads leading to the north and east from

72 - History 79th Div Artillery, 1 Jan - 31 Jan 1945.

73 - 1st Lt Russell T. Blair, "B" Co, 19th AIB.

74 - 315th Infantry Regiment S-2 Report.

75 - History 79th Div Artillery, 1 Jan - 31 Jan 1945.

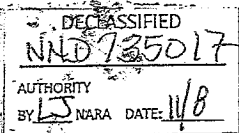


Hatten to prevent enemy reinforcements attempting to aid the
 Germans. The enemy effort was abated by the devastating
 barrage.⁷⁶ American positions were once more consolidated.
 Several Germans gave themselves up soon afterward, complain-
 ing, "they could not stand our artillery any longer".⁷⁷

On January 20th orders were received to withdraw from
 Hatten to a new line of defense.⁷⁸ Two medium tanks and two
 tank destroyers with a small group of infantrymen were to
 act as a rear guard for the withdrawing units. The 94th
 Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was to lead "G" Company, 315th
 Infantry, "A" Company and "C" Company, 19th AIB, "E" and "F"
 Companies, 315th Infantry, "B" Company, 19th AIB, 2nd Chemical
 Battalion and the 813th and 827th Tank Destroyers Battalions
 out.⁷⁹ It was reported that the enemy may have been withdrawing
 to the east while the Americans withdrew to the west,⁸⁰ but
 this statement is not a verified fact.

The welcome end had at last come to the struggle for
 possession of Hatten's rubble, the struggle which has since
 been compared with Cassino and Stalingrad.⁸¹ Hatten, the once

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- 76 - History, 79th Div Artillery, 1 Jan - 31 Jan 1945.
 - 77 - S-3 Journal, 19th AIB.
 - 78 - Ibid.
 - 79 - S-2 Report, 315th Infantry Regiment.
 - 80 - Ibid.
 - 81 - Ibid.



picturesque and congenial Alsatian village was nothing but a smoldering waste. Not a building was left unscarred by the encounter which prevailed when Americans met Germans. The battle for Hatten would long be remembered by all its alumni. Smoke billowed into the air from the still burning timbers of this historic village. Horses, cows and pigs poked about the desolation, bewilderedly looking for food.

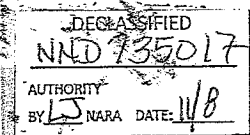
As the Americans passed out of the decaying village, they were conscious of their silent buddies left behind,⁸² still holding the rubbles of Hatten. These Americans who had given the supreme sacrifice were not alone. For every fallen American, more than ten Germans lay dead in the cold snow.⁸³

The men moved quietly along the main supply route, passing numerous American and German tanks, nothing more than rust colored junk now. Down in their hearts, the men were reluctant to leave this village they had fought so gallantly to hold. They felt as if they had lost the war, had fought⁸⁴ and suffered and died in vain. On the contrary however, these warriors had gained precious time by their bitter and

82 - 1st Lt Russell T. Blair; Pfc James R. Benzinger.

83 - Major Forest T. Greene, CO, 19th AIB - History Hdqs, CCR, 14th Arm'd Div, 24 Jan 1945.

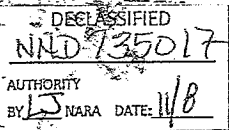
84 - 1st Lt Russell T. Blair; Pfc James R. Benzinger.



magnificent stand. Attack after attack by the enemy had⁸⁵
 been frustrated. The Americans, "with the help of God",⁸⁵
 had managed to hold the best that Hitler had to offer.⁸⁶ The
 steady pounding from both sides had brought ruin and devas-
 tation to the same friendly village of Hatten through which
 these Americans had ridden triumphantly and unmolestedly⁸⁷
 a month before. This fact was particularly distasteful⁸⁸
 to the GIs since the enemy had used the same ground as a
 spring board for its attack. The stress and strain on
 human endurance in the see-saw, house to house, barn to barn
 struggle can hardly be portrayed in mere phrases.

The German High Command had paid heavily in its intended
 smash southward. The enemy drive from the north toward Hag-
 eneau and Strasbourg to flood the Alsatian plain had been⁸⁹
 drastically stalled. The potent enemy thrust, destined to
 play such an important part in Germany's plans had been
 checked. Although the main line of resistance was forced
 back in depth the German drive had lost its force and became
 a limited penetration instead of the much desired break through

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- 85 - 2nd Lt Joseph Osborne, "A" Company, 19th AIB.
 - 86 - 315th Infantry Regiment, S-2 Report.
 - 87 - Pfc James R. Penzinger.
 - 88 - 315th Infantry Regiment, S-2 Report.
 - 89 - G-3, 14th Armored Division, Lt Colonel Joseph C. Lambert.



over this section of the Alsatian plain.⁹⁰ Enemy strategy was completely mastered and befuddled. American commanders had been given sufficient time to properly contend with the enemy's potentially mighty breakthrough, with in reality became a trickle.

The strategic evacuation completely surprised the Germans⁹¹ and they did not attempt to follow. Enemy interference with the withdrawal was negligible although light harassing fire fell during the period.⁹²

The withdrawal continued over ice and snow until reaching the vicinity of Hageneau, along the Moder River. Elements of the 14th Armored Division and the 79th Infantry Division tied in with the new main line of resistance. This was the line they had been gaining time for other organizations to establish. The heroes of Hatten and Rittershoffen established contact with the 36th Infantry Division and 12th Armored Division in the Hageneau sector.⁹³

Casualties of CCR in Hatten were: Killed in action, 3 officers and 23 enlisted men; wounded in action, 13 officers and 272 enlisted men; missing in action, 1 officer and 50

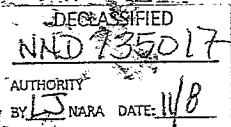
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- 90 - S-2 Report, 315th Infantry Regiment.
 - 91 - Division History, 79th Div, period 1 Jan - 31 Jan 45.
 - 92 - S-2 Report, 315th Infantry Regiment.
 - 93 - See overlay with S-3 Journal, 14th Arm'd Div, 79th Infantry Division.

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BY: LS	DATE: 11/8
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enlisted men. Equipment lost: 17 medium tanks, 5 light tanks, 1 half track, 3 - 57mm anti-tank guns, 1-SCR 506, 1-SCR 300. Enemy losses were estimated at: Killed in action 678; wounded in action, 1000. Enemy equipment lost: 7 Mark IV tanks; 6 anti-tank guns, 3 S/P guns, 16 machine guns and 36 bazookas. 94

94 - History, Hdqs CCR, 14th Arm'd Div, 24 Jan 1945. Other casualties - see 315th Regt, 14th AIB, 242nd Regt "Admission and Disposition" reports.

1st Lt Edgar B. Mooney, Jr
Historical Section
Hdqs, Seventh Army



HEADQUARTERS SEVENTH ARMY
HISTORICAL SECTION
APO 758 U S ARMY

62-358

23 March 1945

Commanding Officer CC "R",
14th Armored Division,
APO 446, U S Army

Dear Colonel Hudelson:

During my discussion with you on 13th March, I took some notes pertain-
to the matters under discussion. It is my opinion that the information that
you gave me is a valuable addition to the historical data which has been
accumulated by members of the Seventh Army Historical Section.

I would appreciate your checking the attached memorandums, which have
been written from the notes mentioned above. If there are any errors, or
corrections to be made, I wish you would indicate them. If you care to
make any additional remarks, I would welcome that assistance also..

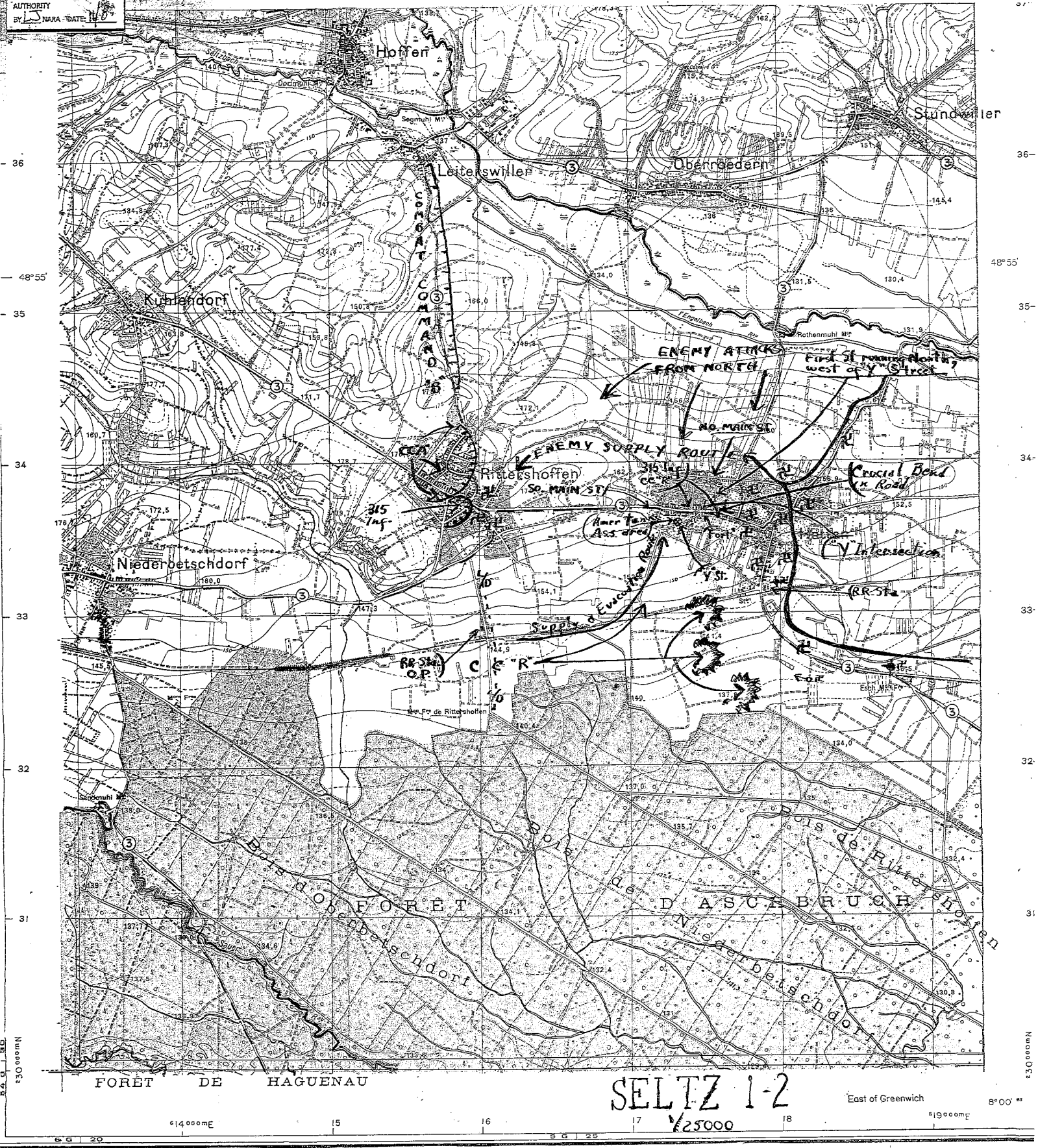
Once again thanks a great deal for your cooperation.

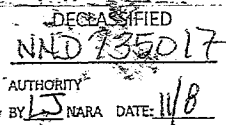
Sincerely yours,

William B. Goddard
WILLIAM B. GODDARD,
Lieut Colonel, Inf,
7th Army Historian.

Col. Arthur H. Hudelson.
W.B.G.

DECLASSIFIED
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BY 13 NARA DATE 11/8





HEADQUARTERS SEVENTH ARMY
HISTORICAL SECTION
APO 758 U.S. ARMY

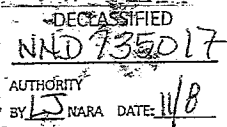
23 March 1945

MEMO: Col. Hudelson's decisions on the Hatten - Rittershoffen action.

On the 13th of March 1945, I visited Colonel Hudelson, Commanding Officer, CCR, 14th Armored Division at his CP in Wilwisheim, Alsace. I visited Col. Hudelson to discuss with him, among other things, the Hatten - Rittershoffen operation. During the discussion of the Hatten - Rittershoffen action of January 13th, in which CCR, 14th Armored, played an important part, Colonel Hudelson told me some of the details of their operation and expressed his opinion on several important points. The following is written from the notes taken by me during this discussion.

The plan for the attack against the enemy forces in Hatten, to be made by CCR, 14th Armored Division, on 13 January, as to time of attack, route of advance and the part of Hatten against which the attack was to be launched was ~~given~~ ^{at 1400 hrs.} to Colonel Hudelson, from VI Corps Headquarters, after dark, the evening before the day that the attack was to be executed. There had been no information given out previous to this time that would have warranted prior planning, or prior reconnaissance. Consequently, the only reconnaissance that could be made was map reconnaissance. The lack of previous reconnaissance of the area over which CCR was to move and, then to attack, was an important factor in the outcome of the operation. It was learned, after the attack was started, that the enemy had many dug-in positions including A-T guns along the southern edge of Rittershoffen and of Hatten, past which and against which CCR had to move in its attack on Hatten. It was, also, learned that the enemy had a strong A-T installation set up around the R.R. Station southeast of Hatten. A reconnaissance would have disclosed this situation and preparatory fires could have been arranged to overcome this enemy fire.

Furthermore, the exact location of the friendly troops that were in Hatten was not available to the Commanding Officer of CCR at the time of the attack. It was known that these troops were generally in the part of Hatten towards which the attack of the armored force was to be made. This made the



placing of tank and supporting fire on Hatten very difficult.

The location of the friendly troops in Rittershoffen was known. They were generally in the western and northwestern portions of this town, but that, too, created a difficult problem. When the tanks had moved south and southeast of Rittershoffen, they came under the fire of the enemy installations south of Rittershoffen and in Rittershoffen. This fire was from anti-tank weapons. The fire could not be returned, for overs and ricochets would have endangered the friendly troops within the town.

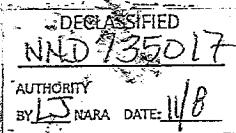
It is believed that, if there had been an opportunity for a thorough reconnaissance of the area before the attack, CCR could have moved into Hatten with a minimum of difficulty. Instead, this armored force actually became engaged in an impossible mission.

The supporting artillery fires kept the enemy infantry down, but the enemy A-T guns were able to continue to fire.

The information as to enemy strength and enemy installations was not accurate. The strength of the enemy had been under-estimated, and the location and quantity of artillery support was incorrect. It was the opinion of Colonel Hudelson that the enemy had brought in a great deal of additional artillery. They had been able to keep this a secret by just firing one gun of a group of guns, to register on a particular area. Then, when the enemy opened up to fire for effect, there was a tremendous amount of fire. The artillery and mortar fire was very heavy and continuous when the fight got under way.

The enemy had a distinct advantage in the terrain formation north of Hatten. Within 600 yards of the town there is a high ridge that runs east and west. The enemy massed troops and armor, unobserved, in the rear (north) of this ridge. At night this force attacked Hatten from the north. The attack was supported by SP guns which went into position near the top of the ridge, fired and then moved back under cover.

The tanks, advancing with this attacking force, moved up to the northern edge of Hatten and fired into the houses. Under the protection of this fire, tanks equipped with flame throwers moved up close to the houses and finished the destruction of them with fire.



The attacks started at night and frequently continued through the day. In one twenty-four hour period, seven such attacks were launched against the northern part of Hatten.

This struggle soon developed into an impossible situation, a mission impossible to accomplish. The supporting artillery fire prevented an enemy victory. Approximately 40,000 artillery shells were fired in the support of this attack.

William B. Goddard

WILLIAM B. GODDARD
Lieut Colonel, Inf
Historian 7th Army

Goddard: -

As an indication of enemy strength, in armor, the attached letter and sketch is attached.

A. Hudelson
Col. Arthur M. Hudelson
W.B.G.

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HEADQUARTERS 14TH ARMORED DIVISION
A.P.O. 446 U.S. ARMY

nwb
22 March 1945.

(2)

SUBJECT: Vehicular Casualties - RITTERSHOFFEN and HATTEN.

TO : See Distribution.

1. The overlay attached indicates the present location of destroyed friendly and enemy vehicles in the vicinity of RITTERSHOFFEN and HATTEN.

2. It is realized that the vehicles remaining on the battlefield do not represent a true picture of casualties because of evacuation by the enemy. For historical purposes however, it is desired that this overlay be brought to the attention of all personnel who were involved in the action, and that friendly and enemy vehicles known to have been disabled during the course of battle, but not shown on the overlay, be added in pencil with a note as to the type and identity.

3. Reports will be collected by battalion, consolidated and forwarded prior to 15 April 1945. Negative reports will be included.

SMITH
Brig Gen
Commanding

OFFICIAL:

1000000
LAMBERT
G-3

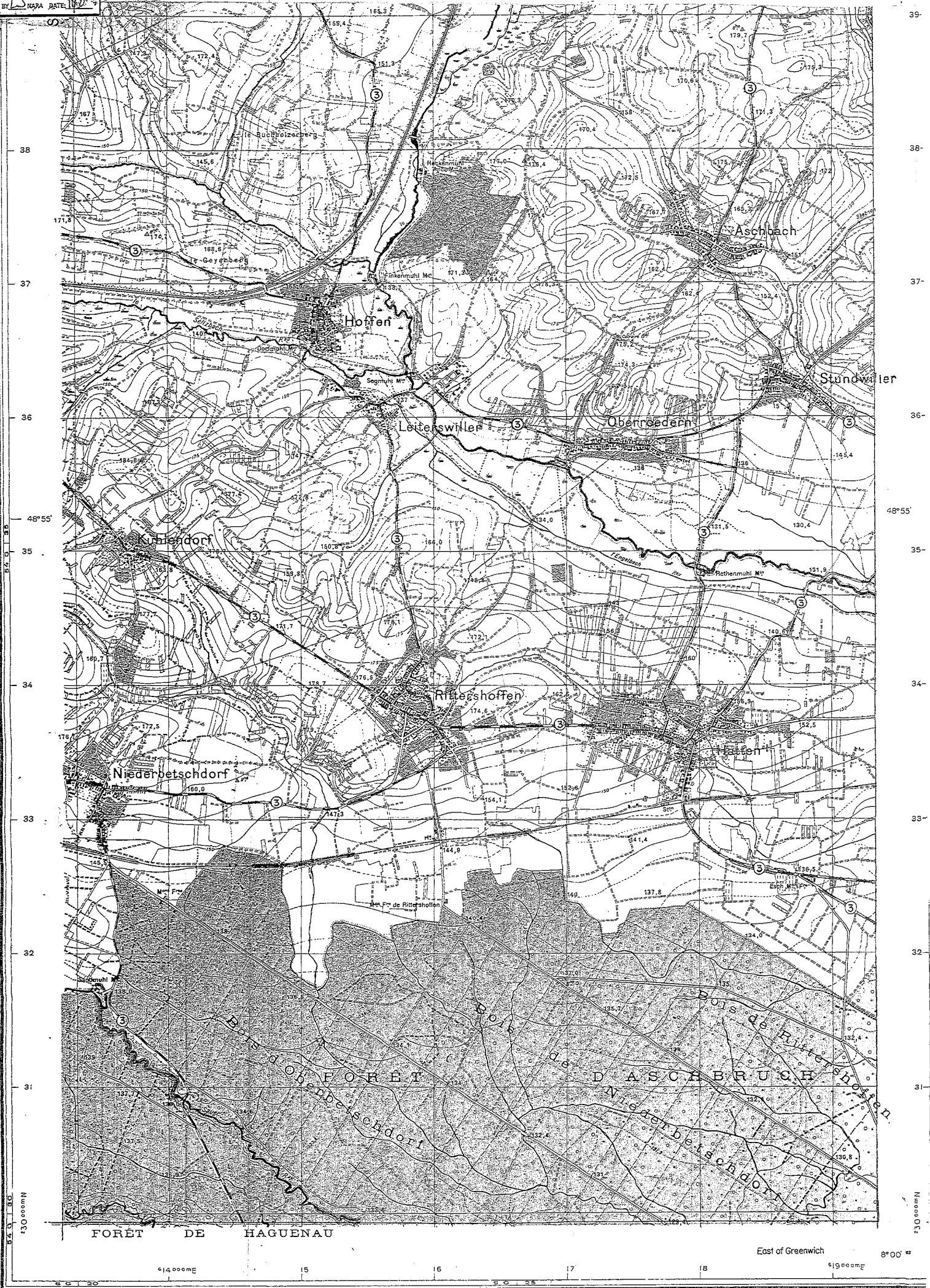
1 Incl: Overlay - Location of Vehicle Casualties.

DISTRIBUTION:	CGA	25
	CCB	47
	CCR	48
	Div Arty	499
	19	500
	62	501
	68	125
		94

- 1 -

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Geographical Section, General Staff No.4411

Reproduced under the direction of The Engineer
7th Army 1944, from Original French 1:20,000 map
dated 1934.

Donnée à l'armée Française 1944, d'après

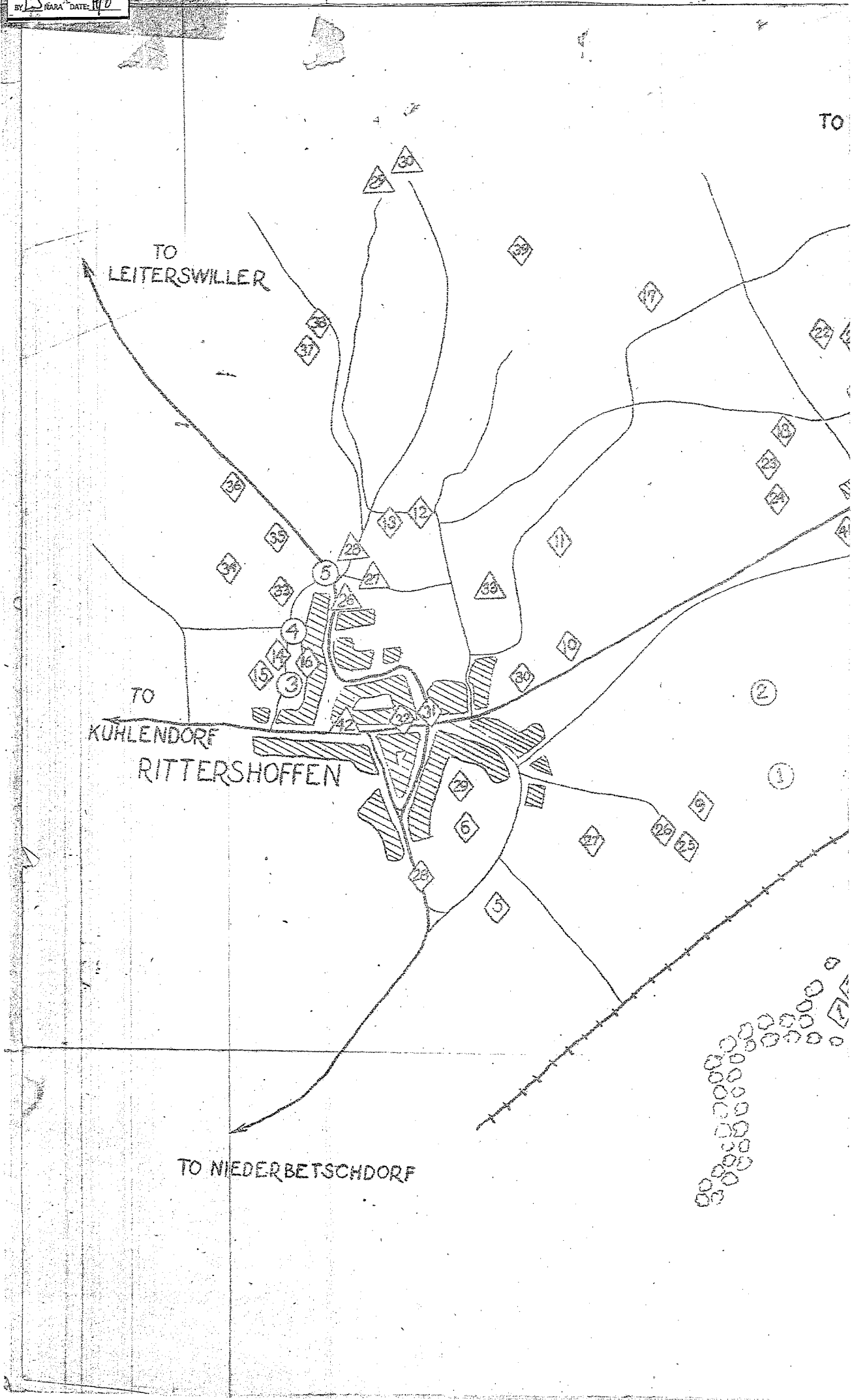
Scale 1:25,000 Echelle

This sheet has been compared with recent aerial photograph
and has been found to be up-to-date.
Cette feuille a été comparée avec des récentes photographies
aériennes et a été trouvée mise à jour.

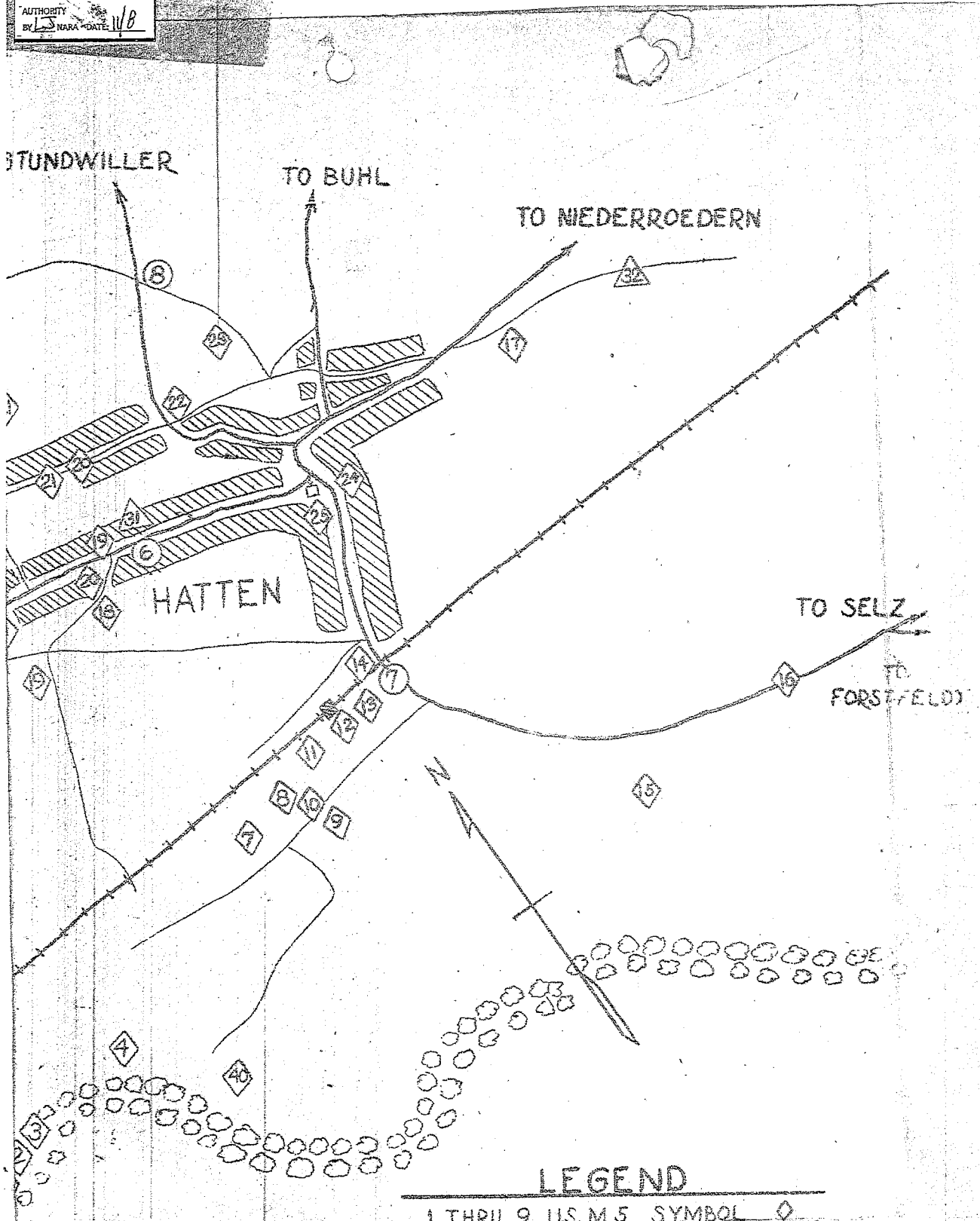
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BY 13 NARA DATE 11/08



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NND 735017
AUTHORITY
BY SP-6/ARA DATE: 11/8



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AUTHORITY
BY LS NARA DATE 11/8



LEGEND

	1 THRU 9	U.S. M 5	SYMBOL	◇
	10 "	41 U.S. M 4	" "	◇
	42 "	- U.S. H.T.	" "	△
	1 THRU 8	EY. SP.	SYMBOL	○
	9 "	25 EY. TK.	" "	◇
	26 "	33 EY. H.T.	" "	△

WOODED AREA